Perceptions and Trajectories of Youth in Baghdad, Al-Basra, and Mosul after the 2014 Conflict with ISIS

—

Survey Findings

Arab Reform Initiative

Farah Al Shami
Research Fellow - Arab Reform Initiative

Cover Photo: Ivan standing in the ruins of an old house in the historic center of Erbil in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq. ©Levi Meir Clancy (Unsplash)

September 2022

Please cite as:
Al Shami, F. (2022). "Perceptions and Trajectories of Youth in Baghdad, Al-Basra, and Mosul after the 2014 Conflict with ISIS: Survey Findings." Arab Reform Initiative (ARI).

About the Author:

Farah Al Shami is a Research Fellow at the Arab Reform Initiative. Her work focuses on Arab Youth Trajectories in Contexts of Conflict; Social Protection in the Post-Covid19 Era in the Arab Region; and the Role of New Labour Movements in Transitions in Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria; among others.

Prior to working at ARI, she was a Program/s Officer and Junior Researcher at the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), the United Nations-Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), and the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut (AUB). Her previous research work covered a wide array of economic development, political economy and political sociology topics in the Arab region: from Tax Justice, Informal Labour, Gender Policies and Public-Private Partnerships, to Inequalities, the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Transnational Social Movements, Governance and Civil Society. She holds a Masters' degree in Policy Economics and Economic Development from Williams College (MA-USA), a Masters' Degree in Economics from AUB, and a Bachelor of Science in Economics from the Lebanese American University.

Table of Content

Executive Summary

This infographics report analyzes and interprets quantitative data that was collected by the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) in Summer 2021 using an extensive in-person/face-to-face survey targeting 676 youth (aged 18-28) in three Iraqi cities (Baghdad, Al-Basra, and Nineveh-Mosul). By doing so, the report aims at assessing the impact of the 2014 conflict with ISIS in Iraq on the perceptions, aspirations, and actual trajectories of youth living in these three cities, namely in terms of education, employment and livelihoods, political participation, civic engagement and peacebuilding efforts, as well as choices for personal life. The survey is part of the Arab Reform Initiative's broader work on how youth in Iraq and other Arab countries have navigated armed conflicts in the last decade.

We find that the conflict has had a significant negative impact on Iraqi youth's education and employment, and that this impact is more pronounced on education compared to employment. This impact happened mainly through the channel of economic hardship and – to a lesser extent – the channel of fear, uncertainty, and security concerns. This impact has also largely shaped the surveyed youth's personal lives and choices. Moreover, surveyed youth expressed apathy towards formal politics and fear of engaging in politics or expressing political views/affiliations/support because of security concerns. The 2014 conflict has had a significantly more negative impact on Iraqi youth's political participation than on their civic engagement.

Although our data shows that the overall impact of the conflict on these different dimensions is significant, the magnitude of this impact is substantially less than one may have expected. We found that the negative impact of the conflict is of a higher magnitude on the actual status quo of Iraqi youth compared to their aspirations and their perceptions of its actual impact. For instance, when asked general questions about the factors affecting their trajectories, Iraqi youth did not or rarely chose "the Iraqi ISIS conflict," whereas when they were directly asked about the impact of this conflict on their trajectories, their answers exhibited a significant importance given to the conflict. In our report, we present various reasons that explain these observations and discrepancies, some of which come from our data and others from our understanding of the Iraqi context. These reasons include the following:

- Part of the circumstances endured by Iraqi youth in the aftermath of the 2014 conflict could be attributed to the political and economic conditions preceding the conflict and perhaps resulting from previous or overlapping conflicts/crises (e.g., the 2003 conflict, the 2014 water poisoning crisis). This might have reduced the perceptions of the impact of the 2014 conflict;
- The surveyed sample is relatively small and limited to the three cities, with Al-Basra and – to a lesser extent – Baghdad were less affected by the conflict compared to Nineveh-Mosul. This might have decreased the magnitude of the conflict's impact in aggregate terms;
- The survey is targeting a sample of youth with a median age of 23, whose employability is limited and inflexible over the studied period (2014-2021). This might have decreased the impact of the conflict on employment;
- Our qualitative research shows that Iraqi youth hold on to their education goals as much as possible and regardless of the circumstances. This might have decreased the impact of the conflict on the surveyed youth's education-related aspirations;
- The way the survey questions are asked can also sometimes solicit the interviewees' perceptions of the direct factors impacting youth trajectories, even though these factors could be the result of the conflict, and sometimes solicit their perceptions of the impact of the Iraqi conflict itself, more indirectly;
- During the conflict, the media was saturated with talks about international interventions against ISIS at the highest level, and the surveyed youth have reported a relatively decent level of trust in the media in the respective question of our survey. This might have made them believe that ISIS will be a short-lived phenomenon and might have kept their optimism high despite the crisis, thus reducing the impact of the conflict on their aspirations and somehow on their perceptions.

The key takeaways of this survey report can be summed up as below:

Education, Employment, and Livelihood Trajectories

- 29.29% of those surveyed believe that the Iraqi conflict has affected their education

path “very badly” and 14.05% of them believe that the Iraqi conflict has affected their education path “badly.”
    - When asked about the factors through which the conflict has affected their education path as such, 31.12% answered “security concerns,” 21.45% answered “impoverishment,” and 18.13% answered “fear of the future.”
- 21.3% of surveyees believe that the conflict has affected their career path, 77% of whom are males.
    - When asked about the way the conflict has affected their career path, 35.66% of them answered “negative impact: lost money/opportunities,” 18.88% answered “I changed my career path,” 18.18% of them answered “I lost my preferred career,” and 12.59% answered “I left my studies during the conflict, or delay in getting a good job.”
- 72% of those surveyed worked for the first time in their life to earn money to help their families or to cover their own expenses.
- 15% of the surveyees who were working before or at the beginning of the conflict have lost their job since then and are no longer working. 67% of the surveyees who were not working before or at the beginning of the conflict were still jobless at the time of the survey.
- The employment conditions of the working respondents have not significantly changed in the aftermath of the conflict with ISIS as compared to before or at the beginning of the conflict, namely with regard to their employment status, their job stability, the sector and the type of their economic activity.
- None of the working respondents has found their job with the help of an NGO that was responding to the conflict. Only 3.5% of them found their job through the government employment office after the conflict. Most of them found it by themselves or with the help of family members and friends.
- The distribution of Iraqi youth across the different monthly net earnings’ groups depicts similar trends before or at the beginning of the conflict, after the conflict, and at the time of the survey. However, Iraqi youth’s overall net earnings per month have decreased, reaching an all-time low in the period right after the conflict, especially for those whose net earnings per month are on the lower bound, meaning those who earn less than one million Iraqi Dinars (the equivalent to USD 700).
- Only 7.25% of respondents believe that the conflict has ever been an opportunity to earn income or get income support, 50% of whom mentioned “by having more job opportunities to consider/take due to the enlargement of the NGO enterprise” and 2.08% of whom mentioned “by joining armed groups/participating in the conflict.”

Personal Life

- The conflict appears to aggravate the way social norms and traditions create gender-based inequalities and reinforce stereotypes regarding the role of men versus that of women as well as the differentiation of acceptable spheres of participation (public versus private sphere) between both genders.
    - 94.53% of respondents believe that women should pursue education in general, whereas 62.87% of respondents believe that women should still pursue education amid conflict.
    - 88.61% of respondents believe that women should work/pursue a career in general (81% of whom are males), whereas 53.99% of respondents believe that women should still work/pursue a career amid conflict (60% of whom are males).
- The Iraqi conflict has had a quite substantial impact on Iraqi youth’s marital statuses, with around 25% of youth having experienced a change in their marital statuses because of the conflict – mostly in the form of a delayed or un-occurred marriage.
- Iraqi youth’s aspirations in the current post-conflict era are mostly education and career related.

Political Participation, Civic Engagement, and Peacebuilding

- The political views and affiliations of 15.68% of the surveyed youth have changed in the aftermath of the Iraqi conflict.
- 38.16% of those surveyed confirmed that the conflict made them abstain from engaging in any form of political participation or simply become less engaged in political and civic action. The conflict’s negative impact on civic engagement is slightly lower than on political participation. However, 77.81% of the surveyed youth believe that collective action is important/very important.
- The greatest majority of respondents believe that the conflict has made their ethnic/

sectarian group worse off. This was at 78.34% in Arab youth, 88.89% in Kurdish youth, and 100% in Turkman youth who believe so. This proportion, therefore, increases as the ethnic group is smaller or more vulnerable. Overall, 77.66% of the surveyed youth believe that the conflict has made all ethno-sectarian groups worse off and not only theirs.

- While 65.24% of the youth do not think that the Iraqi conflict has affected their mental health (or were shy to report otherwise), the rest have mostly reported a negative effect of the conflict on their mental state, especially by confirming that the conflict has made them depressed, more pessimistic, and less productive (29% of those surveyed).
- 59.32% of the respondents are in favour of secularism in Iraq and very few support sectarianism. 22.49% of the respondents have said that they are neither with secularism nor with sectarianism. 9.21% of these specifically stated that they would like to see a "unified Iraq."
- The surveyees' mostly defined citizenship as "identifying as an Iraqi only" and "having a sense of ownership/belonging to Iraq and doing something for the benefit of the country/society." Their most common definitions of social justice are "equality among all Iraqi citizens and Iraqi residents" and "no poverty." The most common definitions of justice are "punishing perpetrators of crimes and those who have used violence against citizens" and "a strong rule of law, following a legal framework that is based on equity and fairness." The most common definitions of peace are "disarmament of militias and no violence" and "implementing justice and fairness." As for the definition of violence, surveyed youth think of it as "armed conflict" and "oppression and little freedom of expression." Finally, concerning freedom, they defined it as "the ability to make their own choices and live how they want to live" and "the ability to practice their religion and live their identity without fear of violence."
- 81.95% of those surveyed do not support/encourage militarized/armed groups as a form of collective action. Only 6.8% of those surveyed have actually opted for or joined the optional military service, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi), the army, the police, or the security forces.
- Although on the level of livelihoods, civil society organizations did not appear to have performed well in responding to the conflict in the eyes of the surveyed youth, 65.98% of those surveyed consider these CSOs very useful/helpful or useful/helpful on the level of political participation, civic engagement, and peacebuilding.
- 33.58% of surveyees do not believe in the honesty of the elections in Iraq and 42.9% of them do not believe in the ability of the elections to make a positive change. This shows a lack of trust in the whole ruling system.
- Only 2.66% of the surveyed youth want to emigrate.
- 33.58% of surveyees expect from NGOs, donors, and other non-State actors to provide jobs/tackle unemployment and 23.67% of surveyees expect from them to conduct awareness programs for youth.
- The aspirations of those surveyed for the future of Iraq mainly include "economic prosperity and poverty eradication" (28.85%) and "overthrown ruling class and replacement with another better and more consensual one" (25.3%). However, 47.04% of surveyees do not think that positive radical/structural change is possible in Iraq in the near future.

Acknowledgments

This report provides in-depth quantitative and qualitative analyses and interpretations of data collected through an extensive survey that was developed by the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) and conducted in-person in three Iraqi conflict-afflicted cities (Baghdad, Al-Basra, and Nineveh-Mosul) by the Independent Institute and Administration Civil Society Studies (IIACSS). ARI is grateful to the IIACSS for making this data collection possible in a sensitive and critical setting like Iraq all while maintaining high quality standards, as well as for the valuable input they contributed to improve the survey questionnaire and for their constructive feedback on this report. The author would also like to thank ARI's deputy director, Ms. Sarah Anne Rennick, for her thoughtful comments and thorough feedback on the report and throughout the whole research process.

This report was carried out with financial support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa-Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the IDRC or its Board of Governors.

Graphic Design: **Ahmad Salhab**

Definitions

YOUTH: We define "youth" as those aged between 18 and 28 (inclusive). This definition is adopted for a very specific reason: we are interested in studying youth who have entered their adulthood in a context of conflict, and who have no pre-conflict adulthood status quo upon which to rely. These youth had not yet embarked on their adulthood pathways prior to the conflict; as such, their decisions with relation to livelihood, wellbeing, family life, personal and professional pursuits, political participation, civic engagement, and attitudes towards and participation in peacebuilding and political processes, among others, have been taken under a context of conflict.

IRAQI CONFLICT: In this report, we refer to the conflict with the Islamic State (ISIS, also known as ISIL or Daesh), which began in Iraq in 2014. ISIS launched an offensive on Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014. On 29 June 2014, ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi announced the formation of a "self-proclaimed" caliphate stretching from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq, and renamed the group the Islamic State. A USA-led coalition began airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq on 7 August 2014, and expanded the campaign to Syria the following month. The then Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State in Iraq on 9 December 2017, after ISIS had lost 95% of its territory, including Mosul, one of the two biggest cities under its control. *(Source: Wilson Center, 2019)*

LIVELIHOOD: Refers to the means to secure the basic necessities of life. These include capabilities, materials, social resources, and economic activities that are essential to everyday life. *(Source: ILO)*

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: Voluntary activities through which people develop and express their opinions, and take part in and shape the decisions/policies that affect their lives. *(Source: Robert Longley, 2021)*

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: Individual or group activities aiming to address issues of public concern, protect public values, or make a change in the community. *(Source: Youth.gov)*

PEACEBUILDING: Any activity that aims to resolve injustice between different social groups in non-violent ways, and to transform the cultural and structural conditions that generate deadly or destructive conflict. *(Source: Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies)*

COLLECTIVE ACTION: An action taken together by a number of people to enhance their condition and achieve a common objective. *(Source: Britannica)*

Why this Infographics Report?

Since 2019, the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) has been conducting a research project that aims at investigating Iraqi youth trajectories in the Iraqi conflict setting, namely their livelihood trajectories and strategies for wellbeing, their political participation, civic engagement, and peacebuilding efforts, the non-linear and complex ways in which conflict has created both opportunities and constraints for construction of self and one's life, and the cross-cutting gender dimension of the impact of conflict on the transition to adulthood.

This research project consists of 75 semi-structured interviews with Iraqi youth in order to assess their trajectories, semi-structured interviews with donors and civil society organizations to assess policy and programming efforts at youth integration, closed policy dialogues with experts and various stakeholders in order to develop more adapted responses to youth needs and aspirations, roundtable discussions with Iraqi youth to reinforce their agency as actors of change, stories and testimonies by young Iraqi women to assess the gendered nature of conflict's impact, animated videos and podcasts providing a platform to Iraqi youth's voices, and comparative desk reviews on the implementation of livelihood programming and the UNSCR 2250 Youth, Peace, and Security agenda in other contexts of conflict.

This report is based on data collected through an original survey covering 676 respondents. It provides ground-up and evidence-based research on the economic, social, and political trajectories of Iraqi youth, thus filling an important knowledge gap. Indeed, our desk reviews show a lack of quantitative data on youth. The available data is often not disaggregated by region within Iraq, age group, gender, social class, religion, or ethnicity, although these elements are essential for a fuller conflict analysis and for an acknowledgement that "youth" does not represent a homogenous category. This report tries to offset this shortfall.

The survey and this ensuing report attempt to understand how Iraqi youth's education and career paths have been affected (or not) by the conflict and how they managed to carve out opportunities for livelihood and strategies for survival and wellbeing in such a critical conflict/post-conflict context. The report also seeks to understand how Iraqi youth's political views, political participation, civic engagement, and peacebuilding efforts have been affected (or not) by the conflict, and their understanding of key concepts and values such as citizenship, social justice, justice, peace, violence, and freedom. The report also aims to assess how Iraqi youth perceive their ethno-sectarian group versus other ethno-sectarian groups, and what common ground exists for social cohesion. Concerning their personal lives, the report strives to understand Iraqi youth's trajectories with regards to marriage, mental health, leisure time and type of activity, and acceptance of social norms, and how these have been affected (or not) by the Iraqi conflict. Finally, the report aims to understand youth's aspirations and priorities for themselves and for their country, as well as to assess the effectiveness of State and non-State responses and in particular youth policies and programming by non-governmental organizations, donors, the Iraqi government, and Iraqi local authorities.

The dataset that has been produced is fundamental for researchers but also decision-makers and is made freely accessible here*. Based on it, this report provides a solid ground to formulate policy recommendations for external actors (local authorities, donors, NGOs and INGOs, policymakers) and to develop adapted programming. Moreover, by visualizing and analyzing striking data points, this infographics report popularizes findings by making them more accessible, including to Iraqi youth themselves. This report can thus serve as an awareness-raising and advocacy tool for Iraqi youth activists and those working with them.

* Please reference data usage as "Al Shami, F. (2022). Perceptions and Trajectories of Youth in Baghdad, Al-Basra, and Mosul after the 2014 Conflict with ISIS: Survey Findings. Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)."

Methodology

- This report analyzes and interprets quantitative data that we collected using an **extensive survey targeting Iraqi youth (aged 18-28) in three Iraqi cities: Baghdad, Al-Basra and Nineveh-Mosul.** The field research was conducted in-person/face-to-face in the three mentioned cities during May and June 2021 using the 'Dooblo' Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) surveying tool. To see the survey questionnaire, please click on this link.

- A total of 676 Iraqi youth were surveyed: 270 from Baghdad, 201 from Nineveh and 207 from Al-Basra, using the **simple random sampling method** which ensures that our sample is as representative as possible of the total youth population in the three cities, as it generates sub-sample groups that are proportionate to this population's respective social groups. This, in turn, ensures that our results are as generalizable on these three Iraqi cities' scale as possible, and not on the national level.

- The adopted simple random sampling technique ensures that our **sample is balanced** in terms of the distribution of those surveyed across the three target cities and the areas/neighbourhoods of these cities, as well as in terms of gender, political views/affiliations, religion, sect, ethnicity, social and economic class, sub-age group, etc. Therefore, the bias in our survey data is reduced to a minimum. To access the sampling frame, please click on this link.

- For each of the three target cities, those surveyed are originally from the respective city and are residents of this city. The survey captures if the surveyee has left their respective city for more than a total of six months since the beginning of the conflict in 2014 until now, and whether they were/are displaced or not.

- Since the simple random sampling method did not capture enough minorities (such as Christians in Mosul/Nineveh) and Black Iraqis (especially in Al-Basra), 30 respondents from each city's sub-sample were not approached based on random sampling but were rather **targeted for belonging to a minority group,** with a careful consideration of the general minority proportions and distributions in each of the three cities.

- The survey was translated to Arabic and was conducted in Arabic to make it fully understandable to the suveyees, and easier to convey by the enumerators.

- Depending on the type and purpose of the survey question, we decided whether only one option/answer is allowed or multiple options/answers are allowed, the question is closed-ended or open-ended, the surveyor should read out the options or not, how long the answer could be, etc.

- When multiple answers/options were allowed, the surveyee was encouraged to choose all options and provide all answers that are correct or that apply. When only one option/answer was allowed, the surveyee was encouraged to choose the best option/answer that applies.

- When multiple options/answers were allowed, we **randomized the options/answers** for the surveyees to avoid any bias towards the first ones. For scoring/rating questions, we made sure that the options are on an **even scale** to avoid any bias towards the neutral/middle option.

- We asked several questions that may be considered repetitive or simply asked in other terms or in different ways. This is part of our **robustness checks method.**

- Some of our questions aimed at measuring the **perceptions or aspirations** of these youth whereas others aimed at measuring their **practices**. The purpose is to understand both, because getting to know youth's attitudes against their realities can provide a fuller vision of whether and how perceptions play out in reality. Moreover, perceptions/aspirations versus facts also help us check the robustness of our results.

- We asked several questions that are not directly related to the Iraqi conflict and its impact but that capture **baselines and external factors** in order to control for them and single out the effect of the Iraqi conflict.

- While our enumerators made sure that the surveyees understand that we are talking about the 2014 ISIS Iraqi conflict, we admit that it is hard to disentangle the impact of this particular conflict from that of other consecutive or overlapping conflicts/crises

in Iraq (e.g. the 2014 water poisoning crisis) since we are studying human behaviour. Therefore, our results represent **a correlation and not a causality** with respect to the 2014 ISIS Iraqi conflict.

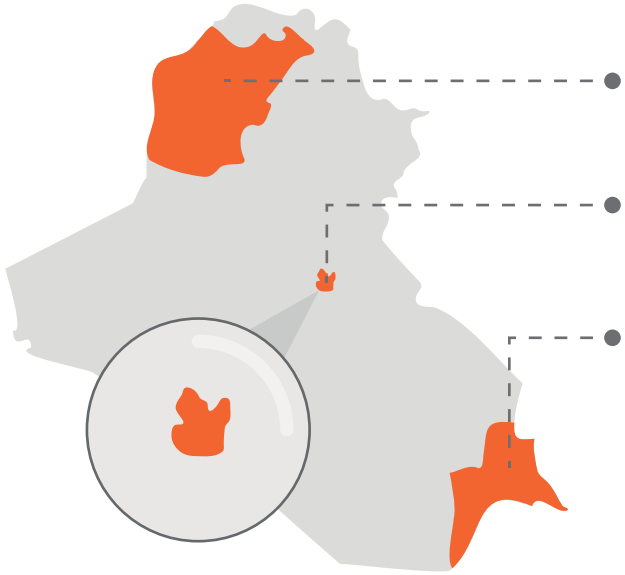
- We analyzed the collected data quantitatively using the STATA 14 statistical software. This was accomplished by running a **correlation matrix** between all variables to find what interesting stories the data has to tell, and by undertaking **tabulations and cross-tabulations** in addition to summary/descriptive statistics, after cleaning the data and treating outliers. This allowed us to visualize the below data in this report. We also provide in this report a brief narrative/qualitative analysis of these findings, which we interpret and synthesize based on our project's broader findings.

- The collected data is very abundant, which makes it impossible to analyze and visualize it all. We were therefore **selective** and only included in this report the most salient and most relevant findings that support or complement our qualitative research, and that serve the direct purpose of the report.

- We presented and analyzed the data in its **disaggregated** format (whether in terms of gender or city or religion or ethnicity or social class or displacement…) whenever possible. When the data is only presented and analyzed in its aggregated format, it means that the disaggregation did not show interesting differentiated results between the different social segments.

Demographic Characteristics and Socio-Economic Profiles

Where are you from?

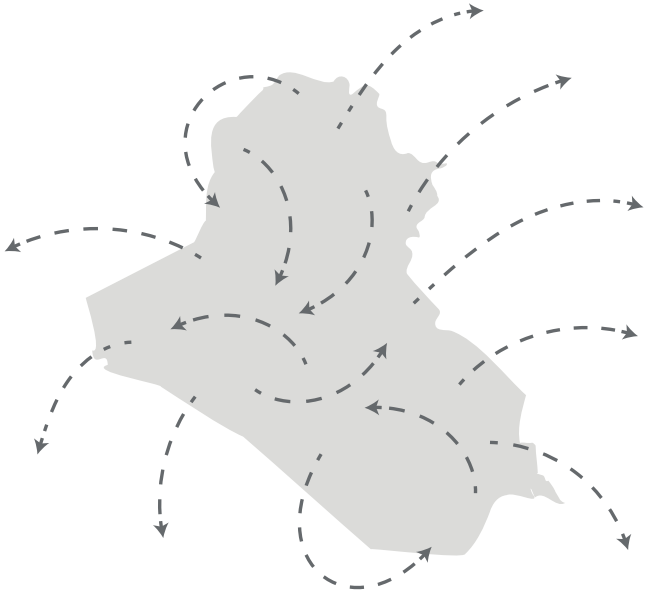


Nineveh-Mosul
201

Baghdad
270

Al-Basra
205

Total sample size
676



Only
10%
left their city for more than six months (cumulative) since 2014

Only
10%
got displaced during the Iraqi ISIS conflict or are now displaced

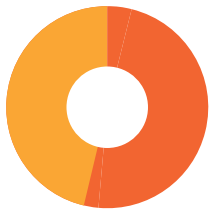
Age range

18 — **28**

23 is the median age*

**i.e. 50% of respondents are below the age of 23 and 50% are above*

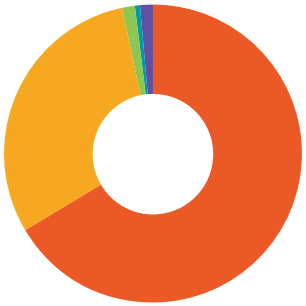
Sex?



Female
44.67%

Male
55.33%

Marital Status



Single
66.42%

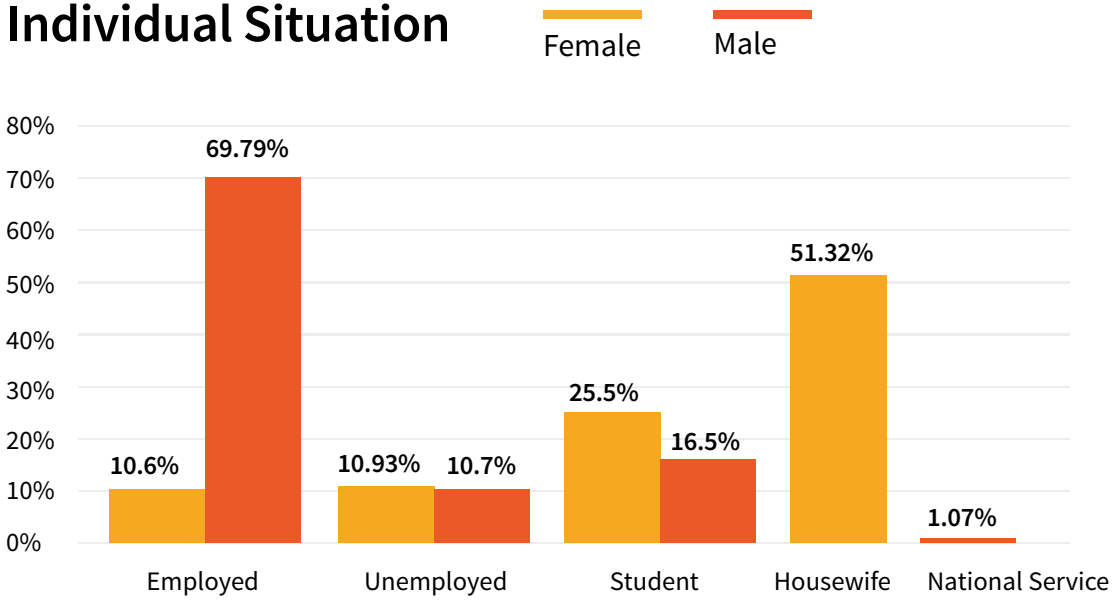
Married
30.33%

Divorced
1.33%

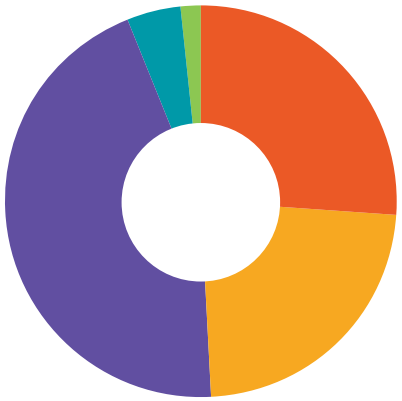
Separated
0.74%

Widowed
1.18%

Individual Situation



What socio-economic class do you think you belong to now?



Low income
26.18%

Low-middle income
23.22%

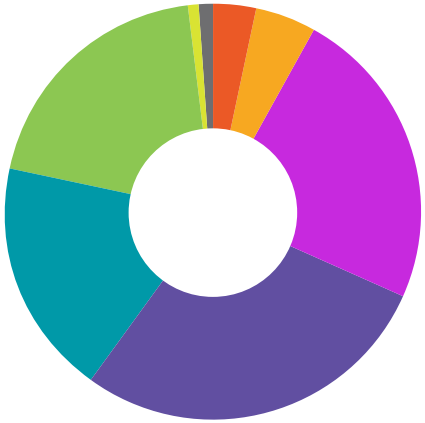
Middle income
44.67%

High-middle income
4.44%

High-income
1.49%

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

No significant difference between men and women



No education-Illiterate
3.4%

No education-Literate
4.88%

Primary school completed
23.52%

Lower secondary school completed
28.25%

Upper secondary school completed
18.49%

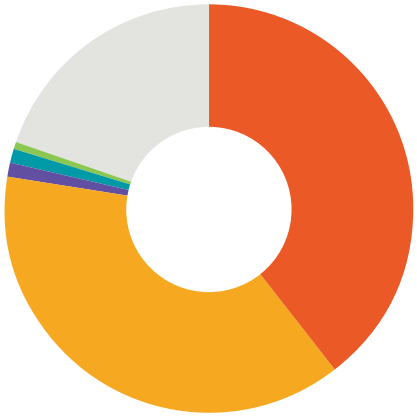
Tertiary education-Bachelor degree or diploma
19.53%

Tertiary education-Masters' degree
0.89%

Tertiary education-Technical school
1.04%

Tertiary education-Doctoral
0.00%

Do you consider yourself a member of any of these religious groups?



Muslim Shia
39.5%

Muslim Sunni
38.17%

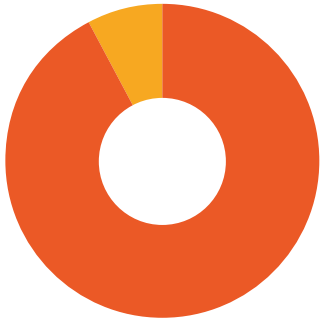
Refused to answer
1.16%

Christian
0.9%

Not religious
0.74%

Other (Specify)
19.53%

Those who answered "Other (Specify)"

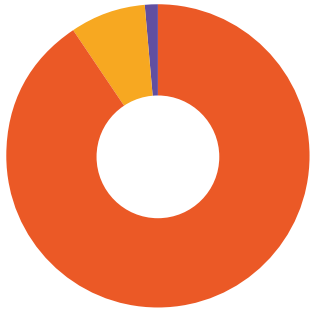


Muslim
92.42%

Iraqi*
7.58%

** This is a common answer in the Arab East when people declare themselves as secular/nationalist and refuse to be identified with or labelled as belonging to any religion, in which case they mention their nationality instead.*

What is your ethnic group?



Arab
90.83%

Turkman
1.18%

Kurd
7.99%

Is the surveyee a Black Iraqi?

Yes
25.15%

No
74.85%

*Of those who are Black Iraqis: 60% are from Al-Basra, 30% are from Baghdad, and only 10% are from Nineveh-Mosul.**

* These percentages are higher than expected, especially for Nineveh-Mosul and – to a lesser extent – Baghdad, since Black Iraqis constitute no more than 5% of the general Iraqi population, most of which are centered in Al-Basra and some of which in certain neighbourhoods of Baghdad (Source: Minority Rights Group International, November 2017). This variance could be explained by: 1) the fact that our sample size is small compared to the total Iraqi population and even the population of the three target cities; and 2) the fact that, in addition to our random sample, we targeted 90 surveyees (30 in each city) who specifically represent minority groups, including the Black Iraqi community, which must have altered the representability of our sample for the population of these three cities on this level.

Education, Employment, and Livelihood Trajectories

Findings and Syntheses

- We find that the Iraqi conflict has had a significant negative impact on Iraqi youth's education and employment, and that this impact is more pronounced on education compared to employment. This finding stems from the fact that 29.29% of youth answered "very badly" and 14.05% of them answered "badly" when asked "how did the Iraqi conflict affect your education path?" When asked "did the Iraqi conflict affect your career path," 21.3% of them answered "yes" and mentioned negative ways/channels through which this happened.

- We understand that more youth reported a negative impact of the Iraqi conflict on education than on employment. This could be because the survey is targeting a sample of youth with a median age of 23, which makes their employability more limited and inflexible over the studied period (2014-2021) compared to their education. This also explains the fact that the employment conditions of the youth who work (their employment status, job stability, sector and type of job, etc.) have not considerably changed now as compared to before or at the beginning of the conflict.

- When asked general questions about education or employment indicators, Iraqi youth did not or rarely chose "the Iraqi ISIS conflict" as a reason, whereas when they were directly asked about the impact of this conflict on their education or employment, their answers exhibited a significant impact of the conflict. We explain this later in this section of the report. We also found a considerable difference between youth's answers to perception-based questions and their answers to factual questions related to the conflict's impact on education and employment. Their answers to the second type of questions show a greater negative impact of the conflict.

Channels of the Conflict's Impact

- The impact of the Iraqi conflict on Iraqi youth's education happens through the channel of economic hardship engendered by the conflict since a great share of the surveyed youth have never been to school before because "school is too expensive," "they have/had to help out their families," or "they have/had to work." In addition, out of the 61% of respondents who have dropped out from school since 2014, 40% have done so because "they had to work or help out at home."

- In addition to "impoverishment," "the loss of the head of household/main breadwinner," and other economic hardship-related reasons, "security concerns" and "fear" also appear to be noticeable factors through which the Iraqi conflict has affected the education paths of youth.

- The impact of the Iraqi conflict on youth's employment also happens mainly through the channel of economic hardship caused by the conflict. 72% of respondents worked for the first time in their life because they needed to "earn money to help their family or to cover their own expenses." Only a small share of respondents worked for the first time in their life because of the Iraqi conflict, yet all those who chose "the Iraqi conflict" as an answer indicated "the economic situation and the need for income" as the way through which the conflict has caused this impact. Working for the sake of earning income to support parents and enduring a dire/shaky economic situation might be the cumulative result of previous/other crises that have hit Iraq, especially after 2004. It is, therefore, hard to establish causality between the 2014 ISIS conflict and these particular realities, more so because surveyed youth came into the age of work during the conflict and have no recollection of previous economic shocks. However, the fact that these answers were chosen among many other options representing reasons for youth to work under normal circumstances, proves that economic hardship was one of the main drivers regardless of whether it was solely the product of the latter conflict or also that of other conflicts/crises.

- We can also conclude from the variety of background questions that the Iraqi conflict has indirectly affected the employment of Iraqi youth by damaging the economy and the business climate, reducing the quality of education services and the availability of jobs, and changing the types of available jobs. It is apparent that Iraqi youth suffer from the problem of skill mismatch. 55.33% of them report that their education did not prepare them well enough for the labour market, and 48.09% of those whose current jobs require particular skills have acquired these skills through self-learning, homeschooling, or on-the-job training. Iraqi youth also suffer from the lack of sufficient and appropriate jobs, with 54% of those currently employed considering

their current job not suitable or not appropriate given their qualifications, and 52.63% of those who refused a job that was offered to them having done so because the job did not suit them.

- The impact of the Iraqi conflict on the job market for youth did not manifest in forcing them to leave their job, get laid off, go bankrupt, and/or close their businesses as much as by making their job-hunting process long and tiresome. 45% of those unemployed have been searching for a job for 1-3 years now, and 67% of respondents who were not working before or at the beginning of the conflict are still not working. These percentages can be attributed in most of their part to the 2014 ISIS conflict because, according to the ILO, "the 2014 crisis has led to an estimated reduction in employment by 800,000 [jobs]." This came in addition to the jobs that were being lost in the aftermath of 2004. Such a reduction in employment opportunities is very substantial compared to the size of the Iraqi labour force, especially the young labour force that is also more susceptible to unemployment and indecent work conditions.

- Not only has the conflict prevented Iraqi youth from profitable economic opportunities and from pursuing their preferred careers, it has also – by imposing more economic burdens – obliged working youth to work five more hours per week, on average. On the other hand, Iraqi youth's net earnings per month have decreased, reaching an all-time low in the period right after the conflict (i.e. during their last/previous job, as compared to now or to before/at the beginning of the conflict), especially for those whose net earnings per month are on the lower bound, meaning those who earn less than one million Iraqi Dinars (the equivalent to USD 700).

Gender: Social Norms and Traditions

- Traditions and social norms have a major influence on Iraqi youth's education and employment, something which has been exacerbated by the Iraqi conflict. Women also appear to be more bound by these social norms and traditions, which is expected especially since 51.32% of our female respondents are housewives and since "less than 15% of women participate in the labour market in Iraq" more generally (World Bank, 2020). In fact, 66.67% of female respondents who have never been to school before blame this on family opposition, and 8.33% of them affirm that this is because "school is not important for girls." As for male respondents, 29.41% of those who have never been to school before believe that "school is not important" in general. 18% of youth who dropped out from school since 2014 have done so simply because "they did not want to finish school."

- Similarly, female respondents who are not currently working and who have not been wanting to work over the past year or two chose "parents/husband would not allow" and "being busy taking care of other family members" as major reasons for that. Moreover, 31.58% of unemployed respondents who have ever refused a job that was offered to them did so because their "parent/husband refused," all of whom are women; and 15.79% of them did so simply because they "did not want to work," 67% of whom are women. Non-working young women have also added that they "felt unsafe to work as ISIS was following women." These social norms and traditions and the consequent fact that women are, on average, more financially dependent on their families and have lower labour force participation, are reasons why young men are more affected than young women by the conflict in terms of employment. This explains why 77% of the surveyees who believed that the Iraqi conflict has affected their career paths are males.

Perceptions/Aspirations versus Reality

- The negative impact of the conflict is of a higher magnitude on the actual education status quo of Iraqi youth compared to their education-related aspirations. We noticed no change in the salience of educational aspirations before and after the conflict, when we asked "what level of schooling did you want to reach before or at the beginning of the Iraqi conflict in 2014?" versus "what level of schooling do you now want to reach?" This indicates that the conflict only had a transitory effect on youth's educational aspirations. One possible interpretation could be that they believed that ISIS will be a short-lived phenomenon as the media was framing it, knowing that the media was saturated with talks about international interventions against ISIS at the highest level (including the then-promised Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS) and that Iraqi youth have reported a relatively decent level of trust in media in the respective question pertaining to the third section of this report. This might have kept their optimism high despite the crisis. Another possible explanation could be that Iraqi youth hold on to their education goals as much as possible and no matter what the circumstances are, a conclusion we could infer from a youth roundtable discussion we organized in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq in Fall 2021. Finally, our data shows that 62.12% of those who believe that the Iraqi conflict has affected their education path "very badly" are from Nineveh-Mosul, which indicates that education was not as badly affected by the conflict in Baghdad and Al-Basra - a finding we expected. This might have kept the youth's educational aspirations high in the latter two cities, thus decreasing the overall impact on educational aspirations in aggregate terms.

- 14.35% of surveyed youth now would like to continue their education.

- As job aspirations of Iraqi youth before or at the beginning of the conflict are harder to capture given their low median age, we examined their current needs and aspirations in this regard. The results show that more than 55% of them need a job, a better job, or financial assistance/support, and more than 72% of them have job-related livelihood aspirations such as a job/a better job, a government job (15.24%), and opening their own business.

- We do not overlook the fact that, when asked general questions about education or employment indicators, Iraqi youth did not or rarely chose "the Iraqi ISIS conflict" as a reason (among the several provided options), whereas when they were directly asked about the impact of this conflict on their education or employment their answers exhibited a very significant impact of the conflict. We explain this as the difference between their perceptions of the factors directly impacting education or employment trajectories and their perceptions more generally (and indirectly) of the impact of the Iraqi conflict on education and employment trajectories.

- With regards to perceptions, 51.04% of Iraqi youth believe that the Iraqi conflict "did not affect their education paths" and 78.7% of Iraqi youth believe that this conflict did not affect their career paths either. These perceptions are, again, overridden by the youth's contradicting answers to the factual questions.

Income Sources and Livelihood Means

- The absolute majority of young workers have affirmed that their job has always been their main source of income, and this did not change as a result of the Iraqi conflict. Nonetheless, 34.47% of the surveyees receive/d aid or support from their parents (including payments for working in family business), with 28% of these aid/support recipients being females.

- 92.75% of surveyees believe that the Iraqi conflict has never been an opportunity to earn income or get income support. The rest (7.25% of surveyees) highlighted "receiving income support from social assistance and social safety nets programs provided by State and non-State actors (humanitarian organizations, international organizations, and local NGOs responding to the conflict)" and "having more job opportunities to consider/take due to the enlargement of the NGO enterprise" as the means through which the conflict constituted an economic opportunity for Iraqi youth. This is despite the fact that only five surveyees currently work at NGOs. Rare are the surveyed youth who reported "joining armed or political groups" as a livelihood means during the conflict.

- We noticed no substantial alteration in the employability in the private sector versus in the public sector currently compared to before or at the beginning of the conflict. Yet, Iraqi youth explicitly expressed interest in finding a government job in particular. This could be due to the fact that they still associate the public sector with job stability, a perception they might have inherited from their parents and previous generations.

The Role of State and Non-State Actors

- None of the youth who are currently working has found their job with the help of an NGO responding to the conflict. Only 3.5% of them found their job through the government employment office after the conflict. Most of them found it by themselves or with the help of family members and friends. Furthermore, only 2.06% of working youth have confirmed to have benefited or have acquired skills from learning and vocational training programs delivered by non-profit organizations in response to the Iraqi conflict.

Vulnerabilities

- Out of the respondents who believe that the Iraqi conflict has affected their education paths very badly, 20% are/were displaced, 62.12% are from Nineveh-Mosul, 55% belong to the low/low-middle income class, 57.58% are Muslim Sunni, 19.2% are Kurd/Turkman, and 13.13% are Black. Out of the respondents who believe that the Iraqi conflict has affected their career paths, 15.38% are/were displaced, 90% are from Baghdad or Nineveh-Mosul, 54% belong to the low/low-middle income class, 49.65% are Muslim Sunni, 12% are Kurd/Turkman, and 23% are Black. These findings are compatible with and reflective of the social groups who identified themselves as "vulnerable" in the survey. They, therefore, show that intersectional analyses are necessary in order to understand the complex ways in which conflict and social identity interact. This in turn highlights the need for policies and programming that take into account these differences and the consequent differential impact of the conflict.

Education

If you have NEVER been to school, why is this so?

Females

Too expensive
8.33%

I had/have to help out my family
16.67%

Family opposition
66.67%

School is not important for girls
8.33%

Due to the Iraqi Conflict
0.00%

Males

Too far/ no transportation
5.88%

Too expensive
11.76%

I had/have to help out my family
17.65%

I had/have to work
23.53%

Family opposition
5.89%

School is not important
29.41%

For health reasons
5.88%

Due to the Iraqi Conflict
0.00%

61% of respondents have left or dropped out of school since 2014.

Out of those

24%
left only because they finished their studies/program

40%
left because they had to work or help out at home

18%
left because they did not want to finish school

and only

2.21%
left because of the Iraqi conflict

How did the Iraqi conflict affect your education path?

Very badly
29.29%

Badly
14.05%

It did not affect my education path
51.04%

Of those who said very badly:

20%
are/were displaced

57.58%
are Muslim Sunni

62.12%
are from Nineveh-Mosul

19.2%
are Kurd/Turkman

55%
belong to the low/low-middle income class

13.13%
are Black

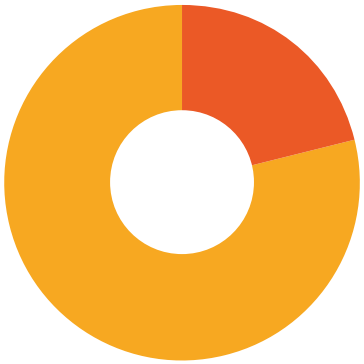
If badly or very badly, through what factors?

Security concerns	**31.12%**
Impoverishment	**21.45%**
Fear of the future	**18.13%**
Loss of hope and ambition	**8.76%**
Difficulty to move around	**6.65%**
Loss of head of household/ main breadwinner	**4.23%**

We noticed no change in the salience of educational aspirations before and after the conflict when we asked “what level of schooling did you want to reach before or at the beginning of the Iraqi ISIS conflict in 2014?” versus “what level of schooling do you now want to reach?”

Employment and Livelihoods

Did the conflict affect your career path?



Yes **21.3%**

No **78.7%**

*77% of those who answered yes are males. (Of those who answered no, almost **50%** are male and **50%** are female).*

Of those who answered yes

15.38% are/were displaced

54% belong to the low/low-middle income class

90% are from Baghdad or Nineveh-Mosul

12% are Kurd/Turkman

49.65% are Muslim Sunni

23% are Black

If yes, how?

Negative impact: Lost money/ opportunities **35.66%**

I left my studies during the conflict; delay in getting a good job **12.59%**

I lost my preferred career **18.18%**

I changed my career path **18.88%**

Joined the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi) **3.5%**

I had to work; my family got injured because of ISIS **6.99%**

We lost our shop/family business **4.2%**

What made you work for the first time in your life?

72% answered to earn money to help their family or to cover their own expenses.

only **0.86%** answered "the Iraqi ISIS conflict."

All those who answered "the Iraqi ISIS conflict" indicated "the economic situation and the need for income" as the reason/channel.

Skill Mismatch

If you have been to school before, do you feel that your education prepared/ is preparing you for the labour market?

Yes
44.67%

Somewhat
17.46%

No
37.87%

54% of those currently employed consider their current job not suitable or not appropriate given their qualifications.

Does your current job require any skill?

Yes
58.88%

No
41.12%

If yes, how did you acquire that skill?

Regular schooling	**34.39%**
Self-learning/homeschooling	**19.05%**
On-the-job training	**13.7%**
Learning/vocational training program by a non-profit in response to the Iraqi ISIS conflict	**2.06%**

Unemployment and Job Opportunities

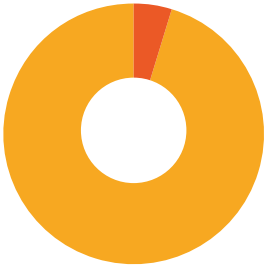
15% of those who were working before or at the beginning of the conflict have lost their job since then and are no longer working.

67% of respondents who were not working before or at the beginning of the conflict are still not working.

60% of those who are not currently working have not wanted to work over the past year or two.

Major reasons behind this ranged from parents/husband would not allow (for females) and social norms more generally, to being busy taking care of other family members (also females), planning to travel, working abroad or migrating, not being able to find the right job opportunity, being tired of job searching, and not being able to find a government job. No one mentioned the Iraqi conflict as a direct reason.

Did you leave your job, were you laid off, or did you close your business due to the Iraqi conflict?



Yes
4.79%

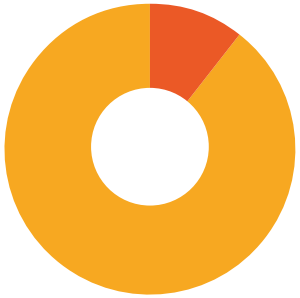
No
95.21%

Those who answered “yes” mentioned the following as the two major reasons: the security situation/war, and living conditions/income was not sufficient. Women, particularly, also added that they felt unsafe as ISIS was following women.

If not employed and have been searching for a job, for how long have you been searching?

1-3 years	6 months	1-3 months
45%	**11%**	**25%**

If unemployed, have you ever refused a job that was offered to you?



Yes
10.7%

No
89.3%

If yes, why?

It didn't suit me because of studies/offered income/work modality/location	**52.63%**
My parents/husband refused	**31.58%**
I did not need to work	**15.79%**

All those who answered "my parents/husband refused" are females. 67% of those who answered "I did not need to work" are females.

Job Market Facts

The employment conditions of those working have not significantly changed now as compared to before or at the beginning of the conflict, namely their employment status (wage worker, employer, self-employed…), their job stability (permanent, temporary, irregular/ casual, seasonal), the sector and the type of their economic activity, etc.

None of those working has found their job with the help of an NGO responding to the conflict.

Only 3.5% of them found their job through the government employment office after the conflict.

Most found it by themselves or with the help of family members and friends.

If employed, what is your sector of employment (legal)?

Only 5 people are employed in a non-profit or non-governmental organization and only 1 in academia.

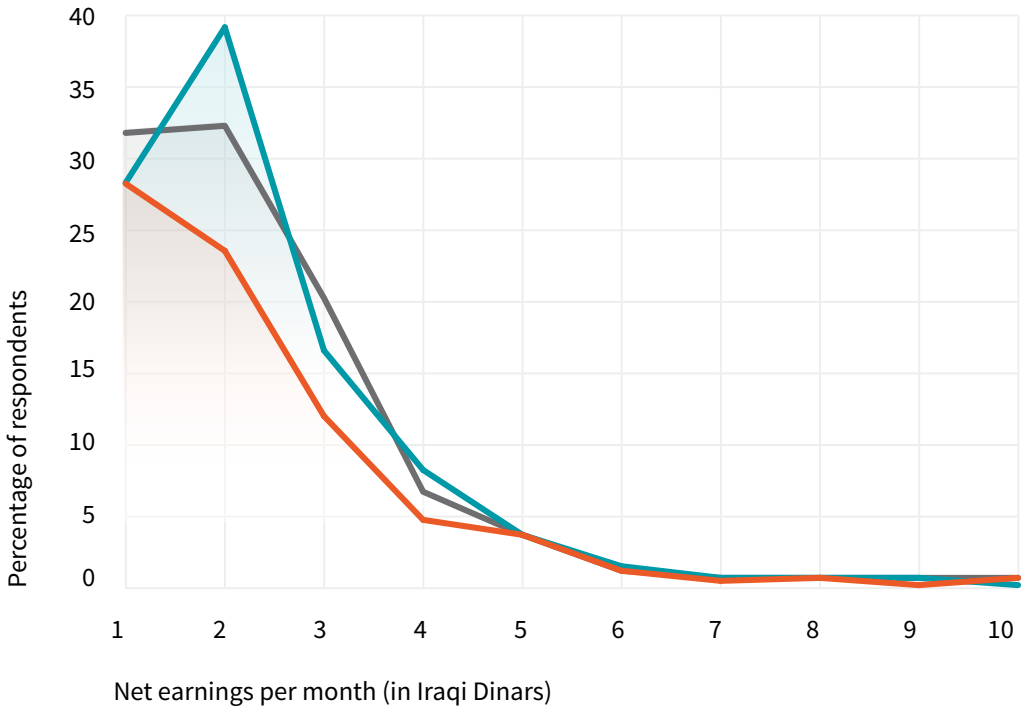
More Economic Burdens

51 HOURS PER WEEK Workers were used to working 51 hours per week on average before or at the beginning of the conflict.

56 HOURS PER WEEK Now, they work an average of 56 hours per week

i.e. a 10% increase in the average working hours per week.

If employed, how much do/did you receive as net earnings/profit per month?



Labels below:

[1] 200,000 or less	[5] 800,000 – 1 million	[9] 7 million- 10 million
[2] 200,000 – 450,000	[6] 1 million – 3 million	[10] 10 million or more
[3] 450,000 – 600,000	[7] 3 million – 5 million	
[4] 600,000 – 800,000	[8] 5 million – 7 million	

Now, if employed

During your last/previous job, if any

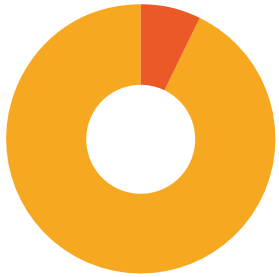
Before or at the beginning of the conflict, if applicable

The distribution of Iraqi youth across the different monthly net earnings groups depicts similar trends before or at the beginning of the conflict, after the conflict (as represented by "during your last/previous job"), and now. However, Iraqi youth's overall net earnings per month have decreased, reaching an all-time low in the period right after the conflict (i.e. during their last/previous job, as compared to now or to before/at the beginning of the conflict), especially for those whose net earnings per month are on the lower bound, meaning those who earn less than one million Iraqi Dinars (approximately USD 700).

Income Source/Support

The **absolute majority** of workers have affirmed that their job has always been their main source of income and that this did not change as a result of the conflict.

Has the conflict ever been an opportunity to earn income or get income support?



Yes
7.25%

No
92.75%

***28%** of those who said yes are females.*

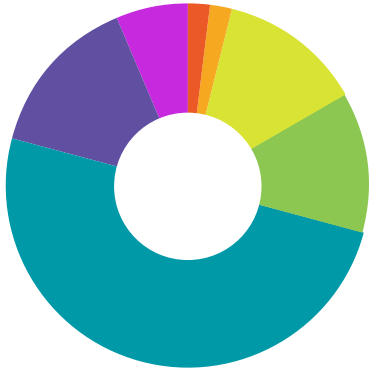
Do/did you receive any aid/support from your parents (including any payment for working in a family business)?

Yes
34.47%

No
65.53%

***28%** of those who said yes are females.*

If yes, how?



By joining armed groups/participating in the conflict
2.08%

By joining a political group that financially supports its affiliates
2.08%

By receiving income support from social assistance and social safety net programs provided by State actors
12.51%

By receiving income support from social assistance and social safety net programs provided by non-State actors, namely humanitarian organizations, international organizations, and local NGOs responding to the conflict
12.50%

By having more job opportunities to consider/take due to the enlargement of the NGO enterprise
50%

I do not know
14.58%

I refuse to answer
6.25%

Vulnerabilities

Do you consider yourself part of a vulnerable social group?

38.64%
Yes

61.09%
No

Out of those who said yes:

75%
are from Nineveh-Mosul or Baghdad

41%
are Muslim Sunni

13%
are/were displaced

10%
are Kurd/Turkman

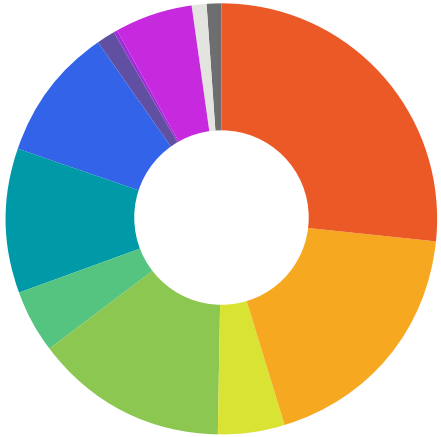
58%
belong to the low/low-middle income class

26%
are Black

11 people became disabled as a result of the conflict, yet only 2 of them consider the Iraqi conflict as a threat to their employment or education pathways.

Needs and Aspirations

What do you need the most during the double crisis (conflict and pandemic*)?



To get financial assistance/support
10.06%

To get exemptions, reliefs, and preferential treatments
1.18%

I do not know
0.3%

A job
26.78

To continue education
14.35%

I do not need anything
5.77%

A better job
18.64%

To marry
4.88%

To voice out and be heard
1.18%

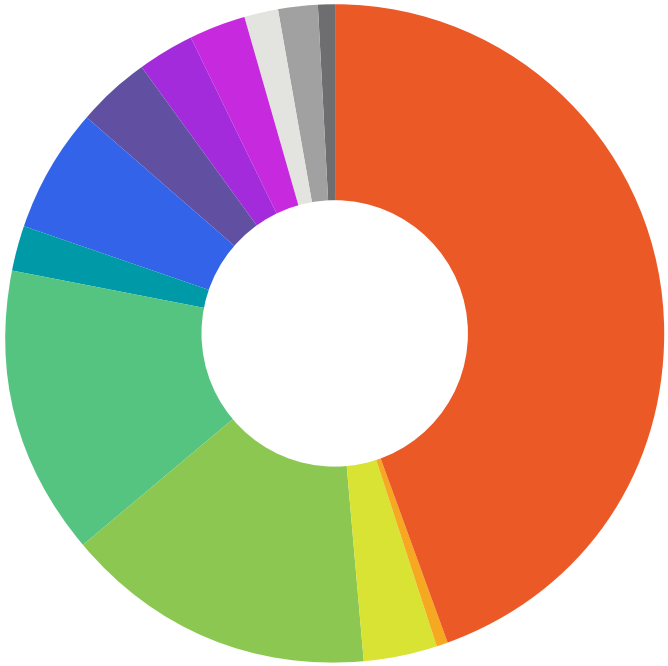
To pursue education
5.03%

To leave the country
10.8%

To participate in ending the conflict
1.03%

* Since this survey was conducted in the post-Covid-19 era and since this particular question asks the surveyed youth about their educational and employment aspirations in general, we thought it would be hard for them to respond to such a forward-looking prompt without having the pandemic in mind.

What would you like to be doing to make a living (i.e. any entrepreneurship plan or career aspiration or job you would like to have), if any?



A job/a better job
44.53%

Marriage/housewife
0.59%

Pursue my studies
6.07%

Nothing
3.55%

Improvement in my career
3.85%

Government job (health, military, education)
15.24%

Learn to sew
2.66%

Open my own business
14.35%

Start up a commercial project
2.81%

I do not know
1.92%

Be an engineer
2.07%

Become a businessperson/manager/famous
1.63%

I refuse to answer
0.73%

Personal Life

Findings and Syntheses

- The results of the survey questions revolving around Iraqi youth's personal lives echo, to a large extent, many of the aforementioned findings on education, employment, and livelihood trajectories.

Gender: Social Norms and Traditions

- Social norms prove again to be a major player in determining Iraqi youth's personal and professional choices and pursuits, and put young women at a higher disadvantage than young men. 71% of the respondents who think that females should not pursue education, in general, are males. The percentage of the respondents who think like this increases considerably to 37.13% when asked the same question amid conflict. 81% of the respondents who think that females should not work/pursue a career are also males, and the percentage of the respondents who believe so increases exponentially to 46.01% when asked the same question amid conflict. In addition, 36.39% of the surveyees – men and women equally - think that men should not/cannot care for their children and do domestic chores, and this percentage increases to 41.27% when asked the same question amid conflict.

- The conflict thus appears to aggravate how social norms and traditions create gender-based inequalities and reinforce stereotypes regarding "men's roles" versus "women's roles" as well as the differentiation of acceptable spheres of participation (public sphere versus private sphere).

Marriage

- The Iraqi conflict has had a quite substantial impact on Iraqi youth's martial statuses, with around 25% of youth having experienced a change in their marital statuses because of the conflict – mostly in the form of a delayed or un-occurred/cancelled marriage. This can be partially explained by the findings of the previous section of this report, namely the dire and shaky economic situation that led to unemployment, inflation, poor income purchasing power, etc., and the fact that marriage was not used by Iraqi youth as a livelihood strategy.

Aspirations

- Iraqi youth's aspirations in the post-conflict era are mostly education and career-related. The gender disaggregation of the indicators of concern demonstrates, again, that women show slightly more interest in education while men appear to be considerably more career-oriented. Overall, women are less anxious about their professional future as 82% of those who answered "it does not matter/this is not important" when asked about "what/where do you want to see yourself in 5 years?" are women.

- The youth who believe that they are well accomplished now and those who are satisfied with where they are at professionally/education-wise today look for marriage and starting a family as a next step.

Leisure

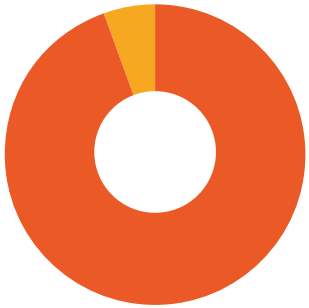
- We found no significant change in the amount of leisure time spent per week between before or at the beginning of the conflict and now. Iraqi youth rarely spend leisure time. There is also no significant change in the type of leisure activity, with the most common being: watching television, walking, drawing, religious visits, football, browsing the internet, reading, cooking, and going out with friends/family - mostly to cafes.

- The slight changes in the type of leisure activity and/or in the amount of leisure hours spent per week were chiefly attributed to the need to work more to cater for themselves and their families' needs, becoming unemployed/with no school due to the conflict and wanting to pass time, the unavailability of a leisure infrastructure, and finding in the leisure activity an escape and a peaceful/safe way to express and exteriorize themselves, all of which are results of the Iraqi conflict.

Gender: Social Norms and Traditions

Do you think females should pursue education?

In General



Yes
94.53%

No
5.47%

*Out of those who said no, **71% are males.***

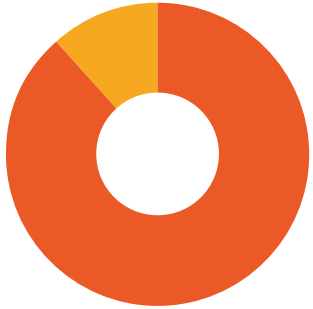
Amid Conflict

Yes
62.87%

No
37.13%

Do you think females should work/pursue a career?

In General

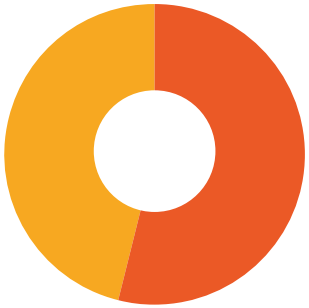


Yes
88.61%

No
11.39%

*Out of those who said no, **81% are males.***

Amid Conflict



Yes
53.99%

No
46.01%

*Out of those who said no, **60% are males.***

Do you think males should/ can care for their children and do domestic chores?

In General

Yes
63.61%

No
36.39%

Amid Conflict

Yes
58.73%

No
41.27%

Marriage and Family

Did your marital status change because of conflict?

Married earlier than expected	8.88%
Not married because of the conflict	11.98%
Divorced because of the conflict	0.89%
Separated because of the conflict	1.04%
Widowed because of the conflict	1.18%
It did not change because of the conflict	75.77%

What do you think is the right age for marriage?

FOR FEMALES

20 the median age is 20 both in general and amid conflict

FOR MALES

25 the median age is 25 both in general and amid conflict

No significant difference between male respondents and female respondents in the responses.

Aspirations

What/where do you want to see yourself in 5 years?

Married with kids
21.15%

With a higher education degree
27.51%

Promoted in my career
17.16%

I do not know
2.37%

In a different career
22.04%

It does not matter/this is not important
9.77%

The gender disaggregation of these responses showed that interest in marriage is similar between men and women. Women showed slightly more interest in education while men appeared to be considerably more career-oriented. Overall, women are less anxious about their professional future as 82% of those who answered “it does not matter/this is not important” are women.

Leisure

The results show no significant change in the amount of leisure time spent per week between before or at the beginning of the conflict and now. Iraqi youth rarely spend leisure time. There is also no significant change in the type of leisure activity, with the most common being: watching television, walking, drawing, religious visits, football, browsing the internet, reading, cooking, and going out with friends/family - mostly to cafes.

If your type of leisure and/or leisure hours spent per week have changed during the conflict, why is this so?

It changed during the conflict but not due to the conflict

12.87%

I started to think of this leisure activity as a source of income, thus taking it more seriously

5.18%

I found in this leisure activity an escape and a peaceful/safe way to express and exteriorize myself

13.31%

I had to work more to cater for myself and/or my family's needs

36.69%

I became unemployed/with no school due to the conflict, so wanted to pass time

18.49%

Leisure infrastructure is not available because of the conflict

13.46%

Political Participation, Civic Engagement, and Peacebuilding

Findings and Syntheses

Fear of Politics and Apathy to Formal Politics

- The Iraqi youth surveyed here demonstrated an aversion for formal politics. 98.52% of them do not consider themselves politically affiliated. 86.89% of them reported not to be politically engaged/an active participant in the political sphere. 93.79% of them do not support any parliamentary alliance or political party, apart from voting and political affiliations. While a major part of these answers is expected to be genuine, a significant part of them could also be attributed to the fact that Iraqi youth do not feel safe or comfortable disclosing details about their political views and political participation.

- In other words, these results could be interpreted as a combination of lack of interest in formal politics, on the one hand, and fear of engaging in politics or expressing political views/affiliations/support for security concerns (limited freedom of speech, killing and assassination of activists, etc.), on the other hand. This combination between indifference and fear can be detected in the answers "I will not vote" (64.94% of respondents) and "I will vote but I do not want to tell you" (26.78% of respondents) to the question "who will you vote for in the next elections?" These answers indicate that indifference to formal politics dominates fear, as the first answer outperforms the second. Indifference can also be detected by the relatively low voter turnout of 41% during the 2021 parliamentary elections.

- Political indifference was also detected when 43.05% of respondents answered "this is not my responsibility" to "how can you participate in building peace in Iraq?" This answer is also indicative of a lack of a sense of agency or role in contributing to peacebuilding. As for political fear, it manifested in the fact that 19.38% of Iraqi youth answered this same question saying "by promoting dialogue, and conflict management/resolution/prevention while acting 'under cover'." However, the fact that 24.7% answered "I do not think I can do anything about that" to this question could be an indicator of pessimism (lack of hope in the system) on the part of surveyed youth and not necessarily of either indifference or fear.

- More direct or restrictive questions such as "do you consider yourself an activist?" and "how else are you politically and civically engaged?" (which came with limited read out options), yielded a higher level of interest and engagement in the political sphere compared to the above-mentioned questions. This raises the caveat that Iraqi youth are not interested in formal politics, but are not politically apathetic either. This is also a sign of the fear entailed in the previous questions. In fact, a significant share of 10.65% of the respondents consider themselves activists, and the greatest majority reported to either participate in elections, participate in protests/demonstrations/social movements[1] , be involved in social mobilization, awareness-raising, advocacy and/or lobbying activities, or to participate in community services/development activities.

Direct Impact of the Conflict

- The political views and affiliations of 15.68% of the surveyed youth have changed in the aftermath of the Iraqi conflict. Out of these, 41.91% attribute this change to the fact that the conflict has changed their logic and understanding, and has made them see things differently; 28.57% attribute this change to the result of oppression and force; and 29.52% affirm that this change is voluntary and not due to the conflict.

- Our data also shows a significant yet not predominant impact of the conflict on Iraqi youth's political participation and civic engagement. In brief, the conflict itself has mostly weakened Iraqi youth's political and civic engagements or left them intact, with the latter effect being the most prominent. 38.16% of those surveyed confirmed that the conflict made them abstain from engaging in any form of political participation or simply become less engaged in political and civic action.

- It is worth noting that the conflict's overall negative impact on civic engagement is slightly lower than that on political participation. This reflects less fear and security concerns associated with civic engagement, and a belief in the ability of civic engagement to make incremental change (which is seen as more feasible and realistic, as confirmed in the qualitative research). This perhaps explains why the percentage of youth who reported stronger civic engagement due to the conflict is relatively higher.

- The greatest majority of respondents believe that the conflict has made their ethnic/sectarian group worse off. 78.34% of Arab youth, 88.89% of Kurdish youth, and 100% of Turkman youth believe so. This proportion, therefore, increases as the ethnic group is smaller or more vulnerable. However, we did not find it to increase with the respondent being a Black Iraqi, or to significantly change between the different religious groups. Muslim Shia reported the lowest relative proportion for feeling worse off.

- It is salient that 77.66% of the surveyed youth believe that the Iraqi conflict has made all ethno-sectarian groups worse off and not only theirs. This seems to imply a belief in the destructiveness of the conflict on Iraq as a whole nation. This also explains why only a small share of the respondents began to think more of their own social identity group and not care about others in the aftermath of conflict.

Mental Health

- While 65.24% of the youth do not think that the Iraqi conflict has affected their mental health (or were shy to report otherwise), the rest have mostly reported a negative effect of the conflict on their mental state, especially by confirming that the conflict has made them depressed, more pessimistic, and less productive. This is compatible with some of the above findings and highlights the importance of providing psycho-social support for youth in conflict.

- Moreover, this can be explained by the fact that those surveyed have identified the most important challenges in their life today as being deprived of basic life needs and decent life standards. The most important challenges they have identified are namely no jobs/unemployment, bad living conditions such as price inflation, lack of essential services (electricity, water, health), difficulty to pursue studies, lack of safety and security, and other psychological and social challenges. This also explains why many youths have lost belief in their ability to affect (or contribute to affecting) social change due to the conflict.

Political Views

- 63.76% of the respondents think that the overall current political system is worse than before 2003 (i.e. before the American intervention), while 22.49% of them think it is the same and the rest think it is better.

- 59.32% of the respondents are now in favor of secularism in Iraq and very few of them are in favor of sectarianism. 22.49% of the respondents have mentioned that they are neither with secularism nor with sectarianism. These particularly represent the people who believe that sectarianism is an issue in Iraq and that religion should be separated from the State, but who still do not want Iraq to become totally secular as they see this to be quite extreme. 9.21% of them specifically stated that they would rather see a "unified Iraq."

- 53.11% of those surveyed consider Iraq to be an Arab country, 30.92% of them consider it to be a Muslim country, and a few consider it to be a Middle Eastern country, a Shia Muslim country, or a Sunni Muslim country. This distribution is proportionate to and representative of our sample's ethno-sectarian structure. Although the other responses represent just a small minority, their answers to the open segment of the corresponding question were noteworthy: "Iraq is a Shia Iranian country" and "Iraq is a non-existing country."

- Out of the youth who stated that they will be voting in the next (2021) elections, 31.25% said that they will vote for Mustafa Al-Kadhimi,[2] 16.67% said that they will vote for Nouri Al-Maliki,[3] 15% said that they will vote for the Alliance Towards Reforms Coalition "Saeroon,"[4] and 10.42% said that they will vote for Faiq Al-Sheikh Ali.[5] The rest of the votes were very miscellaneous, with the "Civil Society for Reform" and "Mustaqilon" (The Independents) being notable. These results somewhat reflect the actual election results of October 2021, which happened a few months after the survey was conducted. These findings indicate a strong inclination of the Iraqi youth population towards the independent and opposing figures and parties who support independent foreign policy, the nation-building of a unified Iraq, rule of law away from militia control, and the appeasement of the sectarian discourse. The fact that the October 2019 uprising has advocated for election boycott, which might have decreased the voter turnout compared to previous elections, further reinforces this conclusion on Iraqi youth's recent political inclinations.

- This does not deny the fact that Iraqi youth are still divided amongst each other and that a great share of them still supports regressive forces such as religious and sectarian representatives with foreign agendas. Not only is this captured by the percentage of votes to Nouri Al-Maliki and to similar leaders or parties, as also apparent in the election results, but it is also captured in the high abstinence from confessing the willingness to vote and the voting choice. Moreover, it is important to

note a degree of contradictoriness in answers. For instance, while youth expressed their support for ideas such as the nation-building of a unified Iraq, they also declared their support for leaders who do not adhere to this vision and their desire to see "religious laws implemented fully," for example. This validates one of the findings of the youth roundtable we organized in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq in 2021, which is that most Iraqi youth suffer an internal struggle whereby they want a better and unified Iraq but they still do not want or cannot compromise their narrow identity, especially for fear of persecution.

- 52.96% of the surveyed youth believe that positive radical/structural change is possible in Iraq in the near future whereas the rest do not believe so. Those who do not believe so mostly blame this on corruption, which could refer to the corruption of the State, the system as a whole, and/or specific institutions. To a lesser extent, the blame is also put on the weak rule of law, weak public institutions, the unwillingness of the Iraqi people to change, as well as on external politics.

Understanding of Key Values

- The most common definitions of citizenship for the surveyed youth are "identifying as an Iraqi only" and "having a sense of ownership/belonging to Iraq and doing something for the benefit of the country/society." The most common definitions of social justice are "equality among all Iraqi citizens and Iraqi residents" and "no poverty." The most common definitions of justice are "punishing perpetrators of crimes and those who have used violence against citizens" and "a strong rule of law, following a legal framework that is based on equity and fairness." The most common definitions of peace are "disarmament of militias and no violence" and "implementing justice and fairness." As for the definition of violence, surveyed youth think of it as "armed conflict" and "oppression and little freedom of expression." Finally, concerning their definition of freedom, they think of it as "the ability to make their own choices and live how they want to live" and "the ability to practice their religion and live their identity without fear of violence."

- The Iraqi conflict was not found to have changed any of these understandings for the great majority (more than 80%) of the respondents.

- It is also relevant to note that 77.81% of the surveyed youth believe that collective action is important/very important. Additionally, while 11.08% of them think that collective action is not important, 7.55% of them think that their "personal development is much more important." The conflict did not change these beliefs for 89.35% of the respondents.

- 18.05% of respondents support/encourage militarized/armed groups as a form of collective action. However, only 6.8% of the respondents have actually opted for or joined the optional military service, the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi), the army, the police, or the security forces in general. 90.48% of those who joined the PMFs, the army, the police, or the security forces were happy to join. Nevertheless, the relatively low engagement in such actions raises major concerns about the reinstatement of military conscription in Iraq, which is currently being seriously under consideration.

Role of Non-State Actors

- Although on the level of livelihoods, civil society organizations did not appear to have performed well in responding to the conflict in the eyes of the surveyed youth, 65.98% of youth consider these CSOs very useful/helpful or useful/helpful on the level of political participation, civic engagement, and peacebuilding. The respondents expect from NGOs, donors, and non-State actors to conduct awareness programs for youth, conduct educational seminars and workshops, and provide security, safety, and freedom, which Iraqi youth are missing. This is in addition to their previously stated desire to see these CSOs provide jobs and combat unemployment.

Challenges and Social Trust

- In addition to social norms and security concerns, 33.58% of the surveyed youth do not believe in the transparency of the elections in Iraq and 42.9% do not believe in the ability of the elections to make a positive change. This shows a lack of trust in the whole ruling system.

- This is further endorsed by the findings of the question where surveyees were asked to rate their own level of trust on a scale of 0 to 9. Their median level of trust in the government and in political parties was as low as 1, whereas their median level of trust in religious authorities, NGOs and the civil society sector, the media, and the private sector was at a medium level of 5. The same results were reported as well when the surveyees were asked to rate the level of trust of the general Iraqi population, as they perceive it, in these same actors.

Aspirations and Needs

- The surveyed youth's general aspirations for the future of Iraq restate their livelihood problems as they involve "economic prosperity and poverty eradication" and "social equality." In addition, they include "overthrowing the ruling class and replacing it with another better and more consensual one" (findings before the October 2021 elections), "constitutional reforms," and "more freedom."

- To meet their dreams and aspirations, the surveyed youth need a job/a better job, financial assistance, safety, stability and freedom, education, a house, improvement in services and living conditions, and support for their families, all of which are basic needs. Deeper but less frequent answers included "I want a better future for my children" and "I want psychological comfort, encouragement, support, and perseverance."

- Only 2.66% of the surveyed youth want to emigrate. While the survey did not delve into reasons for not wanting to emigrate, results from qualitative research with Iraqi activist youth indicate that they are very rooted in their country and do not want to give up their struggle – "at least for the sake of their children."

[1] This was expected given that the Iraqi October (Tishreen) uprising can be qualified as a youth revolution.

[2] An independent politician supported by factions that want Iraq to draw an independent foreign policy. He is also supported by the Sadrist movement, who won the majority of seats in the last elections, and a supporter of the Iraqi October 2019 uprising. He was subject to an assassination attempt on November 7 2021 by suspected pro-Iranian militias who contested the October 2021 general election results. He withdrew his candidacy right before the 2021 elections and did not eventually run for these elections.

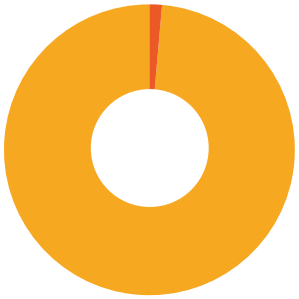
[3] A Shia Muslim politician who is the leader of the State of Law Coalition and the supporter the Islamic Da'wa Party and the Iranian political agenda in Iraq.

[4] The Sadrist coalition whose spiritual leader is Muqtada Al-Sadr.

[5] A Shia Muslim political opposition figure who supports the People's Party for Reform.

Fear of Politics and Apathy to Formal Politics

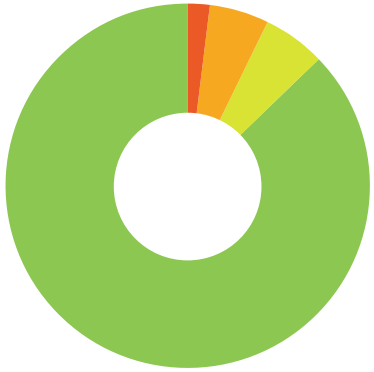
Do you consider yourself politically affiliated (to a political party)?



Yes
1.48%

No
98.52%

Are you politically engaged/an active participant in the political sphere?



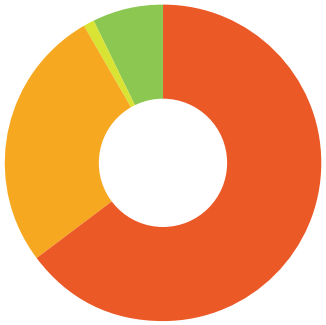
Yes, I am an activist
2.07%

Yes, I vote in elections
5.77%

Yes, I participate in demonstrations/ protests
5.18%

No
86.98%

Who will you vote for in the next elections?

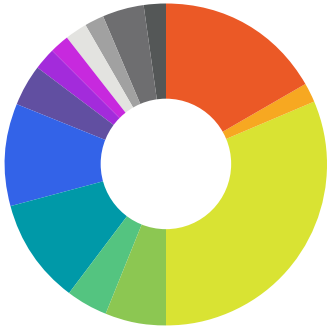


I will not vote
64.94%

I do not know
1.18%

I will vote but I do not want to tell you
26.78%

I will vote for
7.1%



Nouri Al-Maliki
16.67%

Yehya Ahmad Hamadi
2.08%

Mustafa Al-Kadhimi
31.25%

Ayad Allawi
6.25%

Mohamed Al-Halbousi (Progress Party)
4.17%

Alliance Towards Reforms
10.42%

Faiq Al-Sheikh Ali
10.42%

Muqtada Al-Sadr
4.17%

Obaid Al-Hadidi
2.08%

As'ad Al-Abdani
2.08%

Abdel-Wahab Al-Saadi
2.08%

Majed Hussein
2.08%

Ahmad Mohammed
4.17%

Sadeqoon
2.08%

Apart from voting and political affiliations, what parliamentary alliance/political party do you support?

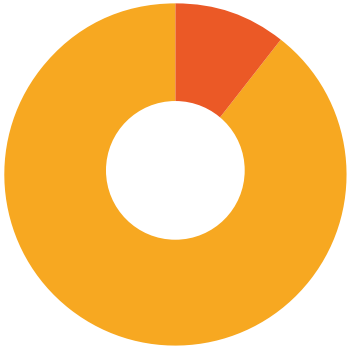
93.79%
answered none

For the rest
the answers provided were mostly
“the State of Law Coalition”
“Alliance Towards Reforms (Saeroon)”
“Civil Society for Reform”
“Mustaqilon” (The Independents)

How else are you politically and civically engaged?

I participate in elections	21.45%
I participate in protests/demonstrations/social movements	21.01%
I am involved in social mobilization, awareness raising, advocacy and/or lobbying activities	14.5%
I participate in community services/development activities (e.g. volunteering in activities such as cleaning the beach, planting trees, training a group, etc.)	23.96%
I did not/will not participate in politics and civic space	14.35%

Do you consider yourself an activist?



Yes
10.65%

No
89.35%

How can you participate in building peace in Iraq?

Through political participation and civic engagement
12.87%

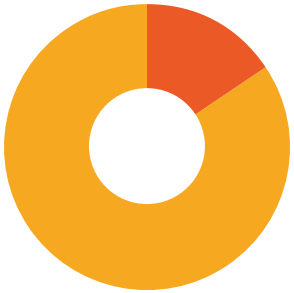
By promoting dialogue, and conflict management/resolution/prevention while acting “under cover”
19.38%

I do not think I can do anything about that
24.7%

This is not my responsibility
43.05%

Direct Impact of the Conflict

Were your political views and political affiliations different before the conflict?



Yes
15.68%

No
84.32%

If yes, did they change ----------?

Due to the conflict but for rational reasons
41.91%

Voluntarily and not due to the conflict
29.52%

Due to the conflict because of oppression (forcibly)
28.57%

Did the conflict strengthen or weaken your political engagement?

6.21%
Strengthen

13.31%
Weaken

80.21%
No change

Did the conflict strengthen or weaken your civic engagement?

10.2%
Strengthen

14.50%
Weaken

75.30%
No change

How did the conflict affect your political participation?

Conflict made me believe in my ability to make (or contribute to making) social change
14.5%

Conflict made me lose belief in my ability to make (or contribute to making) social change
11.54%

Conflict made me think of my own sociological group and not care about others
13.9%

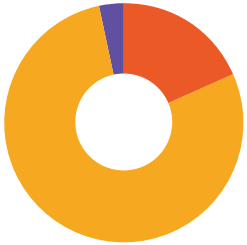
Conflict made me more engaged in political and civic action
10.95%

Conflict made me less engaged in political and civic action
17.46%

Conflict made me abstain from engaging in any form of political participation
20.7%

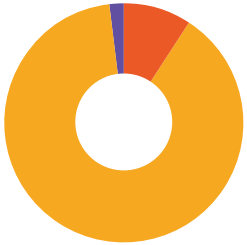
I do not know
10.95%

Did the conflict make your ethnic/ sectarian group better off or worse off?



Arab

Better off	Worse off	I do not Know
18.40%	**78.34%**	**3.26%**



Kurd

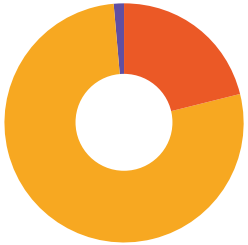
Better off	Worse off	I do not Know
9.26%	**88.89%**	**1.85%**

Turkman

Better off	Worse off
0%	**100%**

The proportion of "worse off" did not increase with the respondent being a Black Iraqi. It also did not change significantly between the different religious groups, with Muslim Shia reporting the lowest relative proportion of "worse off."

Does your answer apply to your ethnic/ sectarian group only or to all ethnic/ sectarian groups in Iraq?



Mine only	All of them	I do not Know
21.15%	**77.66%**	**1.19%**

Did the conflict affect your mental health/ ability?

Yes, it depressed me/I became pessimistic
21.15%

Yes, I became less able to work hard
3.55%

Yes, it challenged me and made me more determined and perseverant
4.44%

Yes, it widened my perspective and opened my eyes to new opportunities and prospects
1.48%

Yes, it narrowed my options, and made me only want to survive and achieve the essential in life (basic education, marriage, etc.)
4.14%

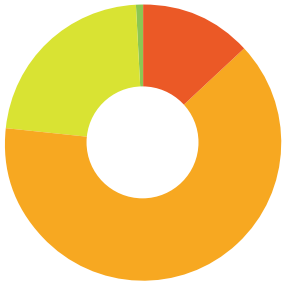
No, it did not
65.24%

What, in your opinion, are the major challenges in your life today?

The most salient answers to this open-ended question are:
No jobs/unemployment, bad living conditions such as price inflation, lack of essential services (electricity, water, health…), difficulty to pursue studies, lack of safety and security, and other psychological and social challenges.

Political Views

Is the overall current political system better or worse than before 2003 (before the American intervention)?



Better **13.17%**

Same **22.49%**

Worse **63.76%**

I do not want to answer **0.58%**

Do you consider Iraq----------?

An Arab country	53.11%	A Shia Muslim country	7.84%
A Middle Eastern country	2.96%	A Sunni Muslim country	3.85%
A Muslim country	30.92%	Other (specify)	0.74%

It was striking that the other specified answers included: “a Shia Iranian country,” and “a non-existing country.”

Are you in favor of----------?

Secularism in Iraq **59.32%**

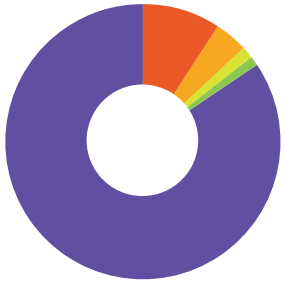
Sectarianism in Iraq **2.65%**

I do not know **7.4%**

I refuse to answer **8.14%**

Other (Specify) **22.49%**

Other (Specify)



Unified Iraq **9.21%**

Islamic Iraq **3.95%**

Democratic Iraq **1.32%**

Sadri’s Iraq (Al-Tayyar Al-Sadri) **1.32%**

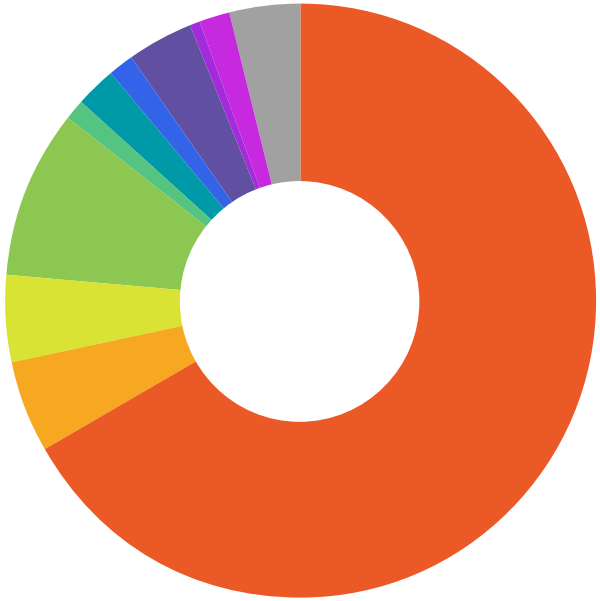
None **84.2%**

Do you think that positive radical/structural change is possible in Iraq in the near future?

Yes
52.96%

No
47.04%

If no, what is the main obstacle to that?



Corruption
66.77%

Weak public institutions
5.06%

People are not willing to change
4.75%

Weak rule of law
9.18%

Lack of transparency and accountability
0.95%

The culture of violence
2.22%

Enormous social divides
1.58%

External politics
3.48%

Constitutional loopholes/flaws
0.63%

Absence of democracy
1.58%

It is complicated/No one knows
3.8%

Understanding of Key Values

What does citizenship mean to you?

Identifying as an Iraqi only
57.98%

Identifying as an Iraqi but also recognizing my other narrower/broader identity
7.25%

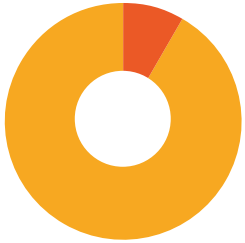
Being recognized under Iraqi law
8.73%

Having a sense of ownership/ belonging to Iraq and doing something for the benefit of the country/society
16.57%

Actively participating in social and political collective action
2.67%

This is a vague term that does not mean a lot to me
6.8%

Did the conflict change that?



Yes
8.58%

No
91.42%

How important is collective action for you?

Very Important
53.11%

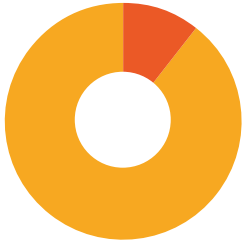
I'm indifferent
3.55%

Important
24.7%

Not important
11.09%

My personal development is much more important
7.55%

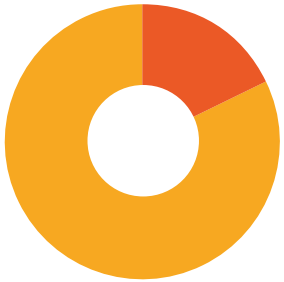
Did the conflict change that?



Yes
10.65%

No
89.35%

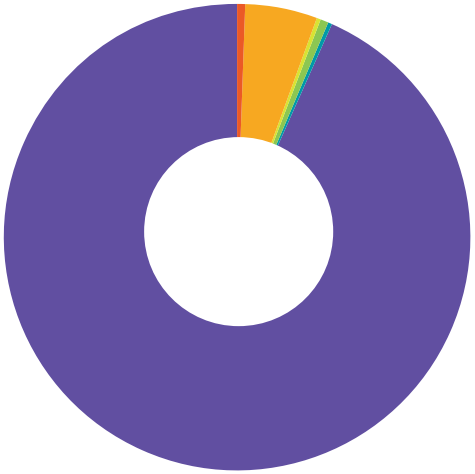
Do you support/ encourage militarized/ armed groups as a form of collective action?



Yes
18.05%

No
81.95%

Did you ever opt for or join ----------?



The optional military service
0.59%

The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF or Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi)
5.03%

The army
0.44%

The security forces in general
0.44%

The police
0.3%

None
93.2%

90.48% of those who joined the PMFs, the army, the police, or the security forces in general were happy to join.

What ONE sentence best captures what social justice means to you?

Equality among all Iraqi citizens and Iraqi residents
40.68%

Equity (i.e. equality of opportunities) among all Iraqi citizens and Iraqi residents
11.54%

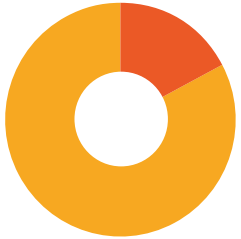
Having a welfare State
3.85%

No poverty
16.27%

Freedom
17.6%

The common good above all
10.06%

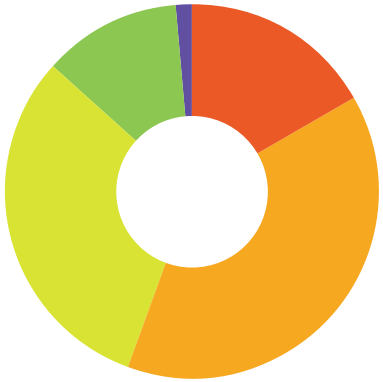
Did the conflict change that?



Yes
17.3%

No
82.70%

What ONE sentence best captures what justice means to you?



Implementing religious laws to the fullest

16.72%

Punishing perpetrators of crimes and those who have used violence against citizens

38.9%

A strong rule of law (i.e. implementation of law), following a legal framework that is based on equity and fairness

31.21%

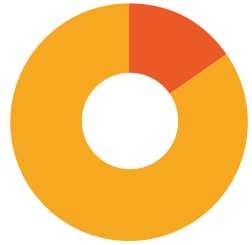
Being provided with what I need to become a healthy, happy, and successful adult

11.98%

I do not know

1.19%

Did the conflict change that?



Yes

15.53%

No

84.47%

What ONE sentence best captures what peace means to you?

Disarmament and no violence

42%

Societal “friendship,” harmony, and cohesion

20.56%

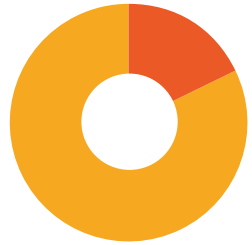
Eradication of the «cold war» that has been waged on Iraq since the early 2000s

10.66%

Implementation of justice and fairness

26.78%

Did the conflict change that?



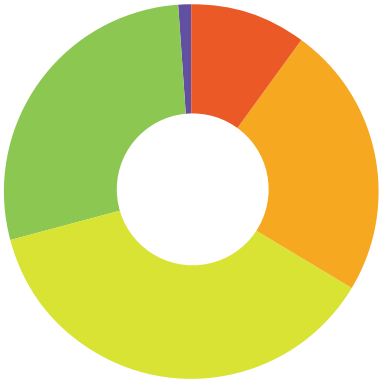
Yes

18.05%

No

81.95%

What ONE sentence best captures what violence means to you?



Any act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm (such as casualties, death, etc.)

10.2%

Hostile behavior that may be physical, verbal or passive in nature, from the State towards the people, or from a social group towards another social group

23.52%

Armed conflict

37.13%

Oppression and little freedom of expression

28.11%

I do not Know

1.04%

Did the conflict change that?

Yes

15.53%

No

84.47%

What ONE sentence best captures what freedom means to you?

The ability to act, speak, think, or move around as I want

20.27%

The ability to practice my religion and live my identity without fear of violence

27.22%

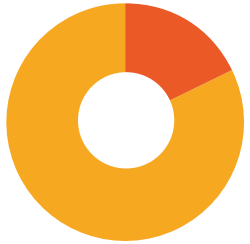
The ability to make my own choices and live how I want to live

27.81%

The ability to live without the fear that the State or security sector will harm me

24.7%

Did the conflict change that?



Yes

17.90%

No

82.1%

Role of Non-State Actors

How do you find the civil society organizations' programs in response to the Iraqi conflict?

Very useful/helpful
25.15%

Not useful/not helpful
17.16%

Useful/helpful
40.83%

Not useful at all/not helpful at all
16.86%

What should NGOs, donors, and other non-State actors do in terms of youth policies and programming for better political participation/civic engagement/ peacebuilding efforts?

Provide jobs/tackle unemployment
33.58%

Conduct awareness programs for young people
23.67%

Ensure civic engagement
4.29%

Intensify efforts to raise awareness of peacebuilding
5.77%

Educational seminars and workshops
10.8%

Provide security/ safety/freedom
10.5%

Provide financial assistance
2.96%

I do not know
6.66%

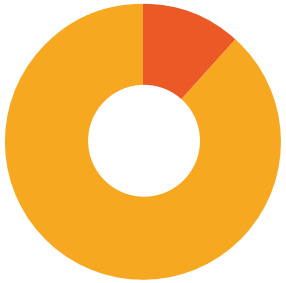
None
1.77%

Challenges and Social Trust

What challenges do you face during elections (all kinds of elections)?

I am bound to my parents/husband's views and I must vote like them	**13.31%**
I am afraid of voting freely (fear of leaked preferences/false secrecy)	**7.69%**
I do not believe in the honesty of elections (conspiracy, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability…)	**33.58%**
I do not believe in the ability of elections to make a positive change	**42.9%**
All of the above	**0.15%**
None	**2.07%**

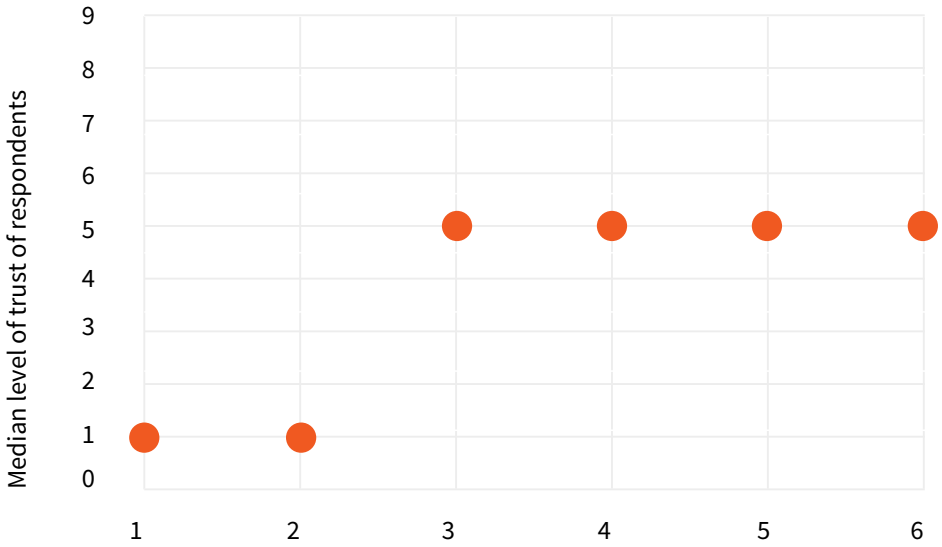
Did the conflict change that?



Yes **11.69%**

No **88.31%**

Can you rate the below from 0 (lowest level) to 9 (Highest level) – speaking about your own level of trust?



[1] level of trust in the government for you
[2] level of trust in political parties for you
[3] level of trust in religious authorities for you
[4] level of trust in NGOs/civil society sector for you
[5] level of trust in media for you
[6] level of trust in the private sector for you

The same results were reported when youth were asked to rate the level of trust of the general Iraqi population.

Aspirations and Needs

What are your aspirations for the future of Iraq?

Constitutional reforms
7.25%

Secularism and coexistence
5.18%

Economic prosperity and poverty eradication
28.85%

Social equality
11.24%

Overthrown ruling class and replacement with another better and more consensual one
25.3%

Break in capitalism and neoliberalism
1.04%

More freedom
15.24%

More democracy
4.88%

I do not Know
1.02%

What do you currently need to meet your dreams/aspirations for your life?

To meet their dreams and aspirations, the surveyed youth mostly need a job/a better job, financial assistance, safety stability and freedom, education, a house, improvement in their services and living conditions, and support for their families, all of which are basic needs. Deeper but less frequent answers included “I want a better future for my children” and “I want psychological comfort, encouragement, support, and perseverance.”

Only 2.66% want to emigrate.

About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

contact@arab-reform.net
Paris - Beirut - Tunis